INTERVIEW WITH LESTER RICHARD WILSON

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Conducted by:
Dr. James L. Dodson
--and--
Miss Paula Boyer

Dodson: Mr. Wilson, I wonder if you'd give us your full name and tell us how long you've lived in the valley.

Wilson: My name is Lester R. --Richard-- Wilson and I've lived in the valley since August of 1920. I was born in Los Angeles in 1911.

Dodson: Mr. Wilson, I think you were just telling us that you are a native son of a native son. Can you tell us a little more about that? When your father came to California?

Wilson: Well my father was born in 1879 in up near Hanford, California and came to Los Angeles in uh... when he was three years old and lived in Monrovia area and went to Monrovia High School. And then came to Los Angeles and lived around Los Angeles and in the valley since that time.

Dodson: I see. You were telling us before we began the tape, something about Mr. Whitsett. Did you know him personally?

Wilson: Yes. I worked in the Security Bank from 1931 when I graduated from high school, until 1936. And Mr. Whitsett was the original, was the founder of Bank of Van Nuys which was later bought by the Security Bank. And Mr. Whitsett was always on the local board of directors there and influential on the local policy of the bank there.

Dodson: Can you tell us a little bit about Mr. Whitsett's part in the development of Van Nuys? The founding of the city?

Wilson: Well, as I understand it he was uh, can you stop that for a minute? I...

[tape stopped briefly]

Dodson: You were telling us some of the stories about Mr. Whitsett, Mr. Wilson. Would you care to put those on tape for us?

Wilson: I could remember back when I was a boy. Mr. Whitsett was quite a colorful figure in Van Nuys. And he had not only credited on starting Van Nuys, and bringing people out by the uh, Pacific Railway on Sundays and feeding them and selling them land. And at times I think the first one they brought out something like 5,000 people, it was a record number. Then later he started the bank in Van Nuys called the Van Nuys' Bank of Van Nuys, which was later sold to the Security... Security First National Bank... or Security Trust and Savings Bank then which became the Security...

Dodson: Pacific?

Wilson: Pacific Bank now.

Dodson: Do you recall where exactly that was located?

Wilson: Well, it uh, on the same location at the corner of Van Nuys Boulevard and Sylvan Street in northeast corner. Of course Van Nuys Blvd. at that time was Sherman Way, was... the main street through Van Nuys was Sherman Way, which at that time nearly every street was Sherman Way. There was a north, south, east, west Sherman Way. And this would be the hub of the four of them, actually.

Dodson: I have an old map of Van Nuys of 1910 which shows Sherman Way in what is now Chandler, coming now to what's now Van Nuys Boulevard. And then Sherman Way runs north and south of what's now Chandler. The northern part running up to what is now Sherman Way and then turning west.

Wilson: That's right.

Dodson: Was that the way that you remembered it?

Wilson: That's right. It had that Circle Drive there, by the Valley Hospital, it cut across and straight up was just a little oil road that went on north but it was also called Sherman Way. And it went up to Mission Acres, which is now Panorama City and Sepulveda.

Paula: That sounds totally confusing to me, ha ha ha... I would think that people would get lost when they got up there. Following Sherman Way up and down...

Wilson: The story... there are stories told about Mr. Whitsett in the early days. He was a rancher part of the time but he was a very sharp and shrewd businessman. He ran... he was president of the Bank of Van Nuys. And the stories are told then, that when he heard of a new farmer that had moved into a new area, why, he would go home, change his clothes, get into his overalls, get into his old model T Ford and... which he uses just for this purpose... and went out and howdy with the farmer. Talked farm talk with him and 'til uh, they finally get around to the point where he'd invite him in to take care of any banking business at the Bank of Van Nuys. Of course at that time, the California Bank was quite active there... was his competitor. He was very shrewish, a very shrewd gentleman. Stories told at one time, if there was a choice between a friend or a dollar, why he'd always pick the dollar first... ha ha ha...

Dodson: Well he was very instrumental in selling the lots which became the city of Van Nuys, was he not?

Wilson: Yes he was. He uh, as I've said before, he brought people out from L.A. and put on a barbecue, and promoted the area. And as I understand it, there was one square mile, ran from Oxnard to Vanowen and from Hazeltine to Kester, that square mile was the original townsite of Van Nuys. And where the Security Bank is, the Security Pacific Bank is now, which was formally the Bank of Van Nuys, was the site of the, his real estate office. And uh, the center of everything was right on the corner of... on the northeast corner of Van Nuys Boulevard and Sylvan Street, it's just a half a block from the big city hall.

Dodson: Was he operating as a real estate man at the same time as he was in the banking business then?

Wilson: Well, I think that he is, has always been a real estate man. That's where he made his money mostly... in buying land. However, as Van Nuys developed, why all the land had been sold then. Taken from the original estate off of Van Nuys, old Colonel Van Nuys, and had been sold. And from then I think, as a businessman and a farmer, he bought and sold pieces of land. Probably as people got disgusted, why, he'd take over the land again and resell it.

Dodson: I see. I believe you said that you knew him personally. Can you describe what he looked like, or mannerisms in speech, or anything like that?

Wilson: Oh, he was a very tall, stately gentleman. And a very uh, quite a dapper gentleman in this, his olderly years. I knew him when he was... oh I guess he was sixty by the time I knew him... and he must've lived up to his eighties.

Dodson: Were you acquainted with any members of the Van Nuys or the Lankershim families?

Wilson: No.

Dodson: I wondered if you... since you came to the valleys some time ago, I'm wondering did you get your education here in the valley?

Wilson: Yes. I went to elementary school 1920, September 1920 I enrolled in the third grade at Van Nuys Elementary School. And some of the teachers that I had there was Mrs. ...?... , she's practically a landmard around Van Nuys, she later married a man by the name of Johnston [sp?].

Dodson: Is she still alive, by any chance?

Wilson: No, she's... she past away a number of years ago. She was probably middle aged in... a ...in... she was probably maybe forty-five or so when I knew her in 1920. And then Mrs. Meyer [sp?] was another teacher. And Mr. ...?... was the principal there, I remember, for a number of ... for two or three years... when I first went there. I've forgotten of the name of the man that followed him. Then from then on to Van Nuys High School. And at that time, when you graduated from the sixth grade at the elementary school that you went to, Van Nuys High which was divided into

Van Nuys Junior High and Van Nuys Senior High and then...

Dodson: Both were in the same building then?

Wilson: In the same building. The only thing was that one had their uh, ... their... uh, assembly time separated from the other. And usually their lunch time was separated by a half an hour. Or... probably... instead of that, I think one was from 11:30 to 12:30, one from 12:30 to 1:30, or something like that. No... I believe we only had a half hour. I believe we had from 11:30 to 12:00 and from 12:00 to 12:30 I believe was the way it was. And senior high had the later lunch hour.

Dodson: Now was that in the same location as the present Van Nuys High School?

Wilson: Yes. But all the buildings have been torn down. One by one rebuilt. When I went there, there was one original building where the uh, at the end of Haynes Street, and uh, it was a two-story building with a... well actually, it was a two-story building with a with a... auditorium on the second story, on the second floor. And then it had, in that area, it had... actually it would be a third story because of the balcony, they had a full balcony on three sides of the building, from the stage clear round. And one very interesting thing whenever I thought of the old auditorium, is one time somewhere around, maybe I was in the ninth grade at the time, someone came in there with the fragrancy of a skunk and uh, apparently in a bottle as near as they can reconstruct afterwards, anyways, have let this out all over one of the upper levels there, just as you went into the balcony. And they went in there and they did everything to clean that. Of course there was quite an investigation over it and they found out who ever it was--it was a couple of boys that lived down in the hills of Tarzana. And they went in there and they fumigate it, or disinfect, they did everything they could, and they repainted it. And I remember for years after that, on a hot day, if you went up into the assembly... we used to file up...and if you went up into the balcony, and you went up into that area, you could still smell that odor of skunk. Ha ha ha...

Dodson: And here we used to think that all the devilment was done by Paula's generation instead of yours... ha ha ha...

Wilson: Another thing that stands out in my mind very vividly is one morning it was the thirteenth, Friday the thirteenth, and we were having our usual bask...er football game that day with our biggest rival, which was San Fernando. And when we arrived to school, to the horror of everybody, why here painted across the front was "Friday the 13th. Friday the 13th." All across both sides of the entrance way and even in the entrance to the school then, was a cement wall. And in the center was this lawn, and across the rest of it was... it was divided, kind of a divided walk... well across that, in two places they had taken this... and this was all written in tar, mind you, and the tar had cooled down overnight... and they had taken a big paint brush and when they got through, the last they did was they wrote near the sidewalk... on the sidewalk, but near the sidewalk that went up and down the street, parallel to the street... on the entrance sidewalk, they had written "Friday the 13th" and they just stuck the brush in there and just let it stick. You can just imagine the furor that it caused. And uh, they uh, of course it wasn't hard to tell it was someone from San Fernando because that was the day of the San Fernando game and all and there had been such a rivalry over the years. And they called off the game. Everything stopped. And they didn't even have the game that afternoon. And they had a big meeting in the assembly hall, I remember, and the school board... members of the school board... came out and investigated it. And they had quite an investigation and it took several days to find out who the culprits were, but, they made quite a to-do over that. Of course it was an expensive thing, cleaning that off... the tar and all.

Dodson: I'm wondering if they were less accustomed to vandalism and pranks in those days, and made more out of it than we would at the present time.

Wilson: I think that they...

Dodson: We've become so accustomed to it, I'm afraid.

Wilson: I think they did. Because I can remember a day when Van Nuys was just a sleepy little city, err town, and we've never heard of the things that you hear of now. You know, you can listen to the police radio now, and gee... Van Nuys is one of the hot spots, you know. There's always something going on. The police are always called out to one of these...

Paula: That's what I heard.

Wilson: ... apartment sections and all.

Paula: Yeah, I heard them talking to some policemen downtown the other day, and I was really surprised.

Wilson: Yeah, Van Nuys is really...

Paula: ....?.... we were talking to them about why, you know, that it must be terrible to be working in downtown Los Angeles. And they said, "Oh no, it's better than working in Van Nuys." They said that Van Nuys is the hot spot for crime at the moment.

Wilson: Yeah, Van Nuys has...

Dodson: Is that right?

Paula: That's what they told us. Because we called them for a burglary that happened downtown, in the middle of downtown, where I happened to work. And I was surprised to hear them say that. They said, "No, Van Nuys is really the bad spot."

Wilson: Well I've heard the same thing just within the last month. I've been taking class over there. I used to go and stop by Officer ...?... And he was telling us that Van Nuys is really quite... quite a place. We have a lot of these big apartment areas, you know, and where you get a hundred or more families living together in these low rental sections, you know. There was something that I wanted to tell you, though, about my early childhood and what happened in Van Nuys that might be interesting.

Dodson: Well, I'm sure it will be. Go right ahead, we'd like to hear it.

Wilson: Well, I was raised on a ten acre ...uh, I called it ranch. A ten acre farm, I guess you'd call it. It was ten acres of alfalfa on the south side of Oxnard, between Hazeltine and Woodman. And in those days, the streets wasn't... Oxnard wasn't paved. And I can remember during the rainy season, not being able to get our car out of our driveway for a period of two weeks, if you could imagine. And we were about three hundred feet, if you recall... three hundred and some feet, Oxnard's three hundred feet south of railroad tracks, that goes through south of Van Nuys.

Dodson: Hhm...

Wilson: And we used to walk across over to these railroad tracks, and this was fine and dry, and we could walk to the town, get our groceries and carry them home. By walking in on these railroad tracks. And Tyrone Street was a regular river and the only way to get across that was on these railroad trestle. And so we'd go into town, get our groceries, and come home, and I'll bet that the... the... the mud was so bad, after when we had some real wet winters. That you just couldn't get a car up and down the street without getting stuck so badly. You couldn't move it! And then, another thing, we had these ten acres of alfalfa but all around us was lima beans, which was... uh, after the small farmers came in, they subdivided Van Nuys into small farms. Why, an awful lot of it was planted into baby limas. And in the fall, they would harvest these lima beans. And you can go out and follow the harvesters, you know, and a few days later you can pick out all sorts of beans that they would leave. Especially if they've been thrashing, why there'd be all kinds of beans. You can pick up pounds and pounds of it. But, the bad thing was that every fall we would have these terrific wind storms. And not having many buildings or trees in the valley, why the winds was uh, would be very strong and we'd get up in the morning and if the wind was blowing, we would look up toward San Fernando and over to the west of San Fernando a little, there's a dip in the mountains there, in the hills, a kind of a saddle there. And the rumor was, back in those days, whenever you looked out there and you saw this cloud ... there was a cloud which settles out there and hang there, you'd know the wind was going to blow continuously for three days. And that was an old saying and it seemed to work out pretty much. That uh, if there was a cloud there, there's something about the wind that would create a cloud... uh, a cloud in that area. And if that cloud was there, why there'd be a three-day windstorm. And that wind, after the thrashing and all, would create so much dust that I've been in Van Nuys... Van Nuys was only a few blocks long in those days, of course, the main part of Van Nuys was probably about three blocks long, strung up and down what was... North-South Sherman way, we'll call it, Van Nuys Boulevard now. At three o'clock in the afternoon they'd turn on the street lights because it got so dark from the dust and all. And the storekeepers would all turn on their lights. Of course the stores in those days were all one story buildings pretty much, and very small stores compared to what we know today.

Dodson: I'm wondering if that cloud is still there. Do you ever look to see whether you can tell nowadays?

Wilson: Well, it's kind of hard to look up there, unless you unless you....

Dodson: You can't see the hills anyway, now.

Wilson: You can't see the hills because of the smog. But I noticed out here, the wind, we don't have the winds here that we had when they were building the place.

Dodson: Oh, I can imagine now.

Wilson: When we were building, we moved out here on the 28th of April 1953. And the day that we moved in, this house and the house across the street was built, there was no sidewalks, curbs, streets, or anything in. They had just graded, this was a track in here. They had taken this for Sherman Way to Valerio and they put in Hazel... err, ...?... and then they put in three streets, Cantlay, Wyandotte, and Leadwell, and started building. We picked out this lot because it had three walnut trees on it. And asked them to built a house and we picked the plan, we had about five plans, and we asked them to build this plan on this lot. And which they did, they built it. The day we moved in they were just putting the roof on, they just had it standing up. And you know how they put in the foundation, the floor, the study, and then the roof on. They were just shingling the roof on either side here. So we lived here on practically nothing.

Dodson: I was going to say, you didn't have much privacy! To do with a thing like that! Ha ha ha...

Wilson: No, it might, why everything was getting so dark, no street lights. But, when the wind would blow, there on the spring, the wind would blow... the dust was jsut terrible, because they had just graded these streets. And it churned up the dirt, you know. And uh, but today, we never get a really windy day like we used to. Because, of everybody's planted trees of course, now. And the apartments, I think, behind this here, we have two-story apartments with the garages below so it seems to lift the wind up so...

Dodson: It certainly would break its force, if it has this many...

Wilson: Yeah. So we seems... the wind seems to uh, go up and above us, not in here. Why, because of the buildings, why, we have very little wind compared to what we used to have.

Dodson: Uh hmm. Do you remember what sort of courses you took when you were in high school? What were your interests?

Wilson: Well...

Dodson: What were the interests of most students? That you remember?

Wilson: Well of course we didn't have all this technology that we have now, but I was always interested in financial things and thought that I wanted to get into advertising. I was the advertising manager of the local school paper and of the annual and so forth. And I used to go out and contact the businessmen. And get their advertising which was, of course a big thing to us, but was very small in comparison to a regular job at the uh... I would go out and mingle around to collect the advertising. Sometimes I had quite a time collecting through some of the businessmen... ha ha ha... We'd go around and sell the advertising and uh, when it's time to collect for it why, sometimes you'd make a number of trips. Why, one time I thought I'd go into the collection business!

Dodson: Was that especially true during the Depression years?

Wilson: Well, I graduated in '31 and of course the Depression was really... I guess getting going by '30, the last year that I was in high school there, actually. But everything was small, the businesses were small. They didn't have too much business. I remember the businessmen used to always have these uh, campaigns. "Buy in your hometown, keep your money at home." But really, there wasn't anything to buy, everything was so high. If we bought anything, most everybody went to Hollywood or to Glendale or to Los Angeles. All the big stores were in Los Angeles. Of course there was a few branches at that time. Broadway had their Hollywood store, and uh, that was the only one that I can recall besides Sears. Of course we used to go to Hollywood to Sears and to Glendale to Sears. If they didn't have what we wanted at Glendale, we'd go to Hollywood the same evening, you know. We thought nothing of going to Hollywood and then to Glendale, or back and forth. It was just like going from one shopping center to another, here.

Dodson: Yes, I'd imagine that one difference between then and now was that the biggest stores were concentrated in the Los Angeles downtown area, instead of having all these branch stores.

Wilson: That's right. They didn't know what branches was. The first branch that I can recall in a department store would be the Broadway, had a branch in Hollywood for many years, I suppose it's still there... I hardly ever go to Hollywood anymore... ha ha ha...

Paula: Yeah. Do you know what happened to be the first store that came out here to the valley? Was there a big store that came out here?

Wilson: Well, a Sears...that when Sears came to the valley, now at that time I lived about five or six blocks from Sears. When I got married in 1942, we bought a little house uh, about two blocks from north of Oxnard and about four or five blocks east of Laurel Canyon.

Paula: Close to Sears over there?

Wilson: And the Sears at... yeah, the valley plaza there. Uh, it was built after the war. After the war, of course so many people came out here during the war and stayed. And an awful lot of servicemen that were in camps here in the valley and in Southern California and liked it so well that when they got out of the service, a lot of them packed up and moved down here because of the climate.

Dodson: Uh hmm.

Wilson: And so the valley grew instead of becoming a deserted area...like a lot of people said when the war was over, everybody leave here and will go back to whereever it was, well they didn't. I can remember the man next door tell me that uh, he was going to sell his house the minute... uh, the minute the war was over. And he did. The minute why, we knew the war was over, he called the real estate man that week and listed his house. And put a price on it which he thought was a good price and the first man that looked at it and bought the place, and wondered what was wrong with this crazy fool. And he told me afterwards, he said, "I couldn't figure out what was wrong with the guy, selling it at that price." And then he told me, he says, "Les, you better sell this, these houses are going to be worth a dime a dozen." Well of course, I think we paid forty-three five for a house. This was a going price for those little houses then. And he got around six thousand for his house. And two or three years later the fella sold it for ninety-five hundred and I sold mine a couple years after that for around thirteen five and since then they've just been going up.

Paula: Yeah, that's true.

Dodson: Have you ever seen that man since? The one that sold out, thinking that everything was going to be a dime a dozen?

Wilson: Well, I did see him after that. I haven't seen him recently, but I did see him oh... three or four years later and he was quite a salesman. And you know how salesman are, they can talk themselves and everybody else into anything, and he was...

Dodson: Well that could be optimistic in that business.

Wilson: Yeah. And he was... well, you've got to get an idea and be sold on the idea. And you're sold that you're right, no matter how wrong you may be. Everybody's out of step but you, you know? And he finally admitted that he was pretty unhappy that he sold.

Dodson: Well, World War II wasn't followed by the same situation after World War I. I think there was a depression, or a recession at least after World War I, but not right after World War II. So there was a difference there.

Wilson: Well don't you think that our mode of transportation was much better, and our ability to get around and uh, people's err... were able to move around more. You didn't go back to the farm and settle down again like they did after World War I, would be my idea of it.

Dodson: And of course from what you say, and everything that I can hear, California boomed after World War II because you did have these service men who've been here temporarily now coming back to stay.

Wilson: Yes. I remember a talk that a friend of ours... was head of McKinley Home for Boys, which was in Van Nuys for many years. I guess it started back in the 20's. And Dr. McGuine's... was head of that. And when the war broke out, why he was... he had been a captain in the first World War and so he was pressed into service. And I remember he was on a furlough and he came out to our church and talked one time. And he said, "After... after the war is over," he says, "You're going to see the biggest growth in this area." "Because, " he says, "everyone you talked to has said that 'when I get out of this service, I'm going to move my family to California.'"

Dodson: Uh hmm.

Wilson: And he said, mainly southern California they seem to work out that way.

Dodson: Well of course I'm no one to talk because I was in Texas during the war but came to California right afterwards.

Wilson: Is that right?

Dodson: So, I'm sort of in that category myself. Can you tell us anything about what sort of social life teenagers had in the valley? When you were in your teens?

Wilson: Well, it was very meager, I'll tell you that. There was a case of riding around in an old model T four door... ha ha ha... We did go to Hollywood, though. Everything was Hollywood. We had a couple of shows here, but they didn't amount to much and they're really one horse town theaters. But, we had the pass, which was the ... which would be going to... down to Ventura and going down Ventura Boulevard and going into Hollywood.....

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Wilson: .... of course in those days we were all kids in high school. After the games, and after a senior play, and the various things, and the yearly operetta that we had, why... uh, everybody would go down to the pass and to these little restaurants. And they had what they called "The Cave", and "The Zulu Hut" none of these were really glamourous names... hahaha... And they were... they looked like... were built and all... and their appointments were just what it said, The Cave and the Zulu Hut, and there were several other similar names. There was The Hawaiian Hut and so forth, and they were just eating places. You go in there and you get a malt and a sandwich and so forth, nothing... nothing elaborate, but they catered to uh, school and college kids all over the valley. And there was very little in the valley to do, and that would be the thing you'd go somewhere, go to a play, go to a movie or something, and you always end up going to Hollywood Boulevard there, which was somewhere between where Lankershim Boulevard comes into Ventura Boulevard and Vineland Road... just around there... just as you start up Cahuenga Pass.

Dodson: I think one thing Paula has missed since she's been here, is all that quaint architecture that we used to have on those little places.

Wilson: Yeah.

Dodson: Those little restaurants. I think that now you don't see that anymore. All sorts of peculiar shapes of the places, I can remember some of those.

Wilson: Well, some of the biggest changes in the valley, to me, is these high-rises. I just can't get over the high-rise that the... the freeways and the high-rise buildings along Ventura Boulevard. All that certainly changed our landscape.

Dodson: Now since we were talking about things to do in the valley, I'm wondering about the celebration of holidays. Whether there was more interest, say, in the Fourth of July at that time than there is now? And Thanksgiving and so on, do you think there was any difference?

Wilson: Oh yes. Yes, I think that the uh, Fourth of July if there was anything going to be opened, a new road or anything, why they would try and hold it off until the Fourth of July and have a big celebration! I remember they opened the Sepulveda Tunnel. Now that would be Sepulveda Boulevard going up through the

Santa Monica Mountains there, they put that tunnel in. And that was a big deal in those days. Used to have to go clear down to Hollywood to get to the beach, and we thought that was really something. We could go to the beach then in half an hour or forty minutes or something real fast. And I remember when they opened that up and everybody drove up there. Of course, it wasn't paved it was just dirt road in those days. And the only pavement was through the tunnel, that little area through the tunnel. But it wasn't long until they did pave the road, though, up through there. And, it got to be quite a road. Of course we had Van Nuys Boulevard went over and but there was an awful lot of turns and twists to that. And Coldwater Canyon and Laurel Canyon went through, but they were very narrow and very twisty.

Dodson: Since the freeway has been built, has that tunnel been obliterated? Through Sepulveda?

Wilson: No, it's still used. No, the old road is still used. In fact, if you go through there at night and that is between four and six o'clock in the evening, the traffic is tied down so badly. A lot of people would take off at Sunset Boulevard or one other... there was an off ramp I believe... uh, Mar... or something there... on up from Sunset. And they would take off there and follow the old road. And it goes ... it goes through here, yeah.

Dodson: I haven't been on the old road a single time since the freeway was built...

Wilson: Oh yeah?

Dodson: ... so I wasn't sure just what the situation of it was.

Wilson: Well it's still... uh, it's still open. You know, people tell me that they still go through that at times. But usually there's there's quite a bit of traffic on it, too. There's a lot of people with the same idea, they want to avoid the traffic which in turn, they create more traffic on the... that, because it's narrower. And uh, more windy and twisty, you know.

Dodson: We're going into the Christmas season now, do you notice any difference in the celebration of Christmas in Van Nuys now? Than the way it was say, forty years ago?

Wilson: Well, yes. The churches used to... used to do a lot of decorating and uh, having Christmas plays and all. Of course our... our I think our social life was centered around two things, the church and the school in those days. If you didn't go to school, or connected to the school in some way through your going or your children going, why, or you... weren't connected to... with a church, you didn't have a lot of social life. I don't think there was anything except... well, the Masons and the Odd Fellows and the... the, there was the Knights of Pythias had a two-story building in Van Nuys. And I don't know what ever happened to them, it's just a name to me now. But uh...

Dodson: I've heard the name, but I don't know anything about them myself.

Wilson: They were quite active at that time.

Paula: I've never heard of them before.

Wilson: And of course the Klu Klux Klan was active in those days for some reason. I didn't know anyone that uh, ever belonged to it but uh, I can remember when I was a boy that go to church. I went to Methodist Church in Van Nuys in those days and in fact, from 1920 onto a few years ago, why, I was quite active in the Methodist Church. I can remember when I was a boy, at night, a group of men oh, maybe twelve or fourteen of them were coming in, you know. In their sheets and all, white robes, you know, the Klu Klux Klan and they had walked in and sit there through part of the service and pretty soon they'd get up and out they'd go. Now I don't know what they were, what they were protesting at the time, because we didn't have... you couldn't count half a dozen Negroes, I don't think, in the whole valley!

Paula: Hhm!

Wilson: We had Mexicans at that time, and the Mexicans had their own school Lemona Street School, it was over east of uh, just east of Sepulveda. Well uh... it was uh, it's on Lemona Street which is just west of Kester. And you see uh...the western part of uh, end of Erwin Street, Erwin? Delano... and Calvert... Delano and Calvert, principally, was Mexican from Kester to uh... east to uh... well up to the business let off there at Van Nuys Boulevard, up in back of that business area. That area in there, two or three blocks there is all little houses. And that was the Mexican area. So they built a school, the the city built a school over there, just west of where they lived. And they called it Lemona Street School and that was practically all Mexican. Now we didn't have we didn't have any trouble with segregation or immigration or integration or anything. We didn't have any much integration. However, some of the Mexicans, they went through the first few grades in there, and then they would send them over to Van Nuys. And send them to Van Nuys High School, I guess, from junior high. And they would come there and usually in a year or two, maybe a semester or two, most of them dropped out. Hardly any of them went on into high school.

Dodson: Hhm.

Wilson: For some reason. Of course I think the poverty situation and all, and usually the Mexican parents were uneducated and so the kids have to start working by the time they got into the... old enough to get into high school. Why, they were old enough to start earning money, either for themselves or to help the family.

Dodson: Uh hmm.

Wilson: But I don't remember any Mexicans graduating from high school.

Dodson: Is that right?

Wilson: But we had lots of Mexicans living in that area.

Paula: I was going to say, were there any other minorities in the area?

Wilson: There were a few Japanese. But of course the Japanese, you called them a minority but they were the A students and they were right on the top of everything. We had one there uh... I went to school with a girl and and she was in my classes uh, Saksuma Ikigami [sp ?] and her uh, her brother was oh two or three years older.

I don't remember his name. His first name, right now. But uhm, he was one of the football stars. He was on the football team, if you can imagine a Japanese being big enough. But he was! He was as big as the other fellows. He was real agile and he was one of our stars, I can remember. I'm sorry, I haven't thought of him for years, I don't remember his first name. Ikigami [sp?] was the last name, was very peculiar. Her name was Saksuma [sp?] , I know.

Dodson: Do you recall whether there was any bad feelings against the Japanese residents at the beginning of the war? On account of Pearl Harbor?

Wilson: Oh yes.

Dodson: Demonstration against them here?

Wilson: Oh yeah, yeah. There was a lot of demonstration. I knew the captain of the police that was stationed there in Van Nuys. Over in the valley division. And the valley was all under this one... there was just one division here in the valley, then. And I remember reading an article that he wrote in the Van Nuys News about warning people about taking the law into their own hands and all. This was in the early days. Before, they'd round them up and put them in concentration camps.

Dodson: Yes, I've heard of that.

Wilson: But before that, they would go by and they would throw bottles and they would throw things at the houses, you know. And they would... they would create quite a nuisance, you know. And yet these people were just... probably were just as patriotic as any of us. Some of them had been here may be here for two or three generations and uh, they were just as upset about what was happening in their country as we were!

Dodson: Yes, we all know about that now. Of course we know about the record of the Japanese-American Battalion. Quite the most decorated in the American Army during the war. But uh, of course then there was that feeling I suppose.

Wilson: Well they'd go by at night and they'd throw anything in. Maybe even shoot at the windows, they would shoot the windows out of their houses and so forth. There was a lot of things happen that way, that uh, unbecoming to good Americans, I'm sure.

Dodson: Is that the only trouble that we could call a minority trouble in your lifetime here in the valley then?

Wilson: Well, no. We've had... we've had a lot of problems in the uh, Pacoima area and all. But of course that has been recent, that's been since the war.

Dodson: Uh hmm.

Wilson: Of course it's said that there was 60,000 Negroes in California at the start of the war... I mean, in Los Angeles at the start of the war. And there was a quarter of a million at the end of the war, I read, somewhere... I don't know how authentic it is. But it was during the war years that the Negroes came out here. Of course the 60,000 they said that we had were all... were... they're pretty much the Uncle Tom type. That they worked as a servant type of work or they had a certain class of work that they did.

And they seemed to be satisfied with it. And nobody was upsetting them and making them unhappy. And... maybe they didn't know any better or something?

Dodson: Uh, have the relations with the Mexican-American group in the valley usually have been good, would you say? Now they were of course here before the Anglos came in.

Wilson: Well of course the Mexicans that we uh... that we know though, I don't think are the same type of Mexicans that were here before that... the Anglos came. The Mexicans that we knew were the dark, real dark-skinned uh... Mexican-Indians that came out of the hills of northern Mexico. And the ones that have the background of the Banditos and so forth. But uh, and the very uneducated. When I was working for Security Bank, I worked for a while in San Fernando. Now San Fernando had lots of Mexicans. And they had some of the early Mexicans or American-Mexicans... or early California-Mexicans and some of the big accounts in those days, if you had several thousand dollars in your checking account you had a lot of money, you were rich. And when I worked for Security Bank from 1931 to 1936, of course that was a lot of money. And I remember there was an account by the name of Ventura [sp?] and several Mexican names... but those weren't the Gonzalez [sp?] and all that we had here in Van Nuys. These people, they were lucky if they could count up to ten, probably. I mean, they were a different type of Mexican than the type that were the farmers and all.

Dodson: Early Californians?

Wilson: The early Californian-Mexicans were were... intelligent, as I understand. But these people were a very low grade, mentally. And this is why they finally took them out. When I first went to school, the Mexicans did come to Van Nuys Elementary School. And they pretty much had... they had some of them in our classes, but then it wasn't long until they had special classes for them. And some of them only came half day. And they were pretty well segregated that way. And then, they built this Lemona Street School. And then we didn't see any Mexicans. But when there was parades, why they'd be out and sometimes there'd be plates or windows broken or something would happen and they'd get a little out of hand. They get into the celebration too much.

Dodson: Uh hmm.

Wilson: But they were kept pretty well segregated in Van Nuys. Now in... as I say, San Fernando, they had Mexicans. They had two classes of Mexicans. They had the upper class and they had the... uh, what do you call it? the so-called ghetto type, I guess.

Dodson: Can you tell us anything about religious life inthe valley? I think you mentioned that a person didn't have much social life except through his school and his church.

Wilson: That's right. On Sundays there wasn't anything else to do but go to church, it seems like. Everything was pretty much closed. The stores were all closed. We didn't have stores open from noon to four or six, like they are now.

Dodson: Were movie theaters closed too, at that time?

Wilson: No, I believe the movies were open. As I remember as a young fella, we didn't go to church on... I mean we didn't go to the movies on Sundays. That was kind of a no-no. And... at least in the group that I was in. And I was quite active in the Methodist church and in the Valley Organizations. And we'd go around and we'd have young people between six, six-thirty to seven thirty at our church. And then that group that I used to go around in and go to other programs and all. And at that time there was Burbank, North Hollywood, Van Nuys, Canoga Park, which at that time was Owensmouth, and then there was that little church at Chattsworth, and San Fernando. And that was all Methodist churches, of course. And I say, you either belong to the Methodist church, you belong to the Baptist, you belong to the Catholic or whatever you did, and you had an awful lot of your friends were uh, at least the ones you ran around with on Sundays, belong to the church that you belong to. And this was pretty much the way we were. Now, I suppose that there were a lot of people that uh, in the valley just as there is now, that didn't go to church. And they had their other activities.

Dodson: Would you say that church-going was more common though. That the major, the greater majority did go at that time, than now?

Wilson: Yeah.

Dodson: That there was a deeper religious feeling in general?

Wilson: Yes I think so. I think... I think there was a bigger percentage, a larger percentage of people went to church then. Of course people were closer to the earth in those days. Most, an awful lot of them either raised chicken, raised rabbits, uh, farmed in some way. They were connected to uh, with farming. And I think, I think that type of person that works hard all day and uh... if for no other reason, it's the chance to put on their good clothes and go somewhere that they wouldn't be able to do otherwise if they didn't go to church, you know?

Paula: I'd like to ask you something, it's purely personal but, the Methodist church in Burbank. Which one was the first one that was there when you were going around?

Wilson: Well, it's...

Paula: Is it the one on Magnolia Park or the one on the hill?

Wilson: No, the one up on the hill there, on uh... Glenoaks. I think it's the one on Glenoaks.

Paula: Is that the....?....

Wilson: Palm, is it Palm and Glenoaks? Well they... I think they built a new one and they moved it since those days. I think they got one on Glenoaks now. I think the other one used to be on... it seems like Palm Avenue... or Olive.... somewhere like that.

Paula: Oh, I was just wondering.

Wilson: Uh, well yeah, I say that. However, the church that was in Magnolia Park was uh, that was a real estate development, you know. Earl... uh, Earl K. White, was it? No it wasn't. Well anyway, Earl... Earl... Earl White uh, started Canoga Park... err uh...

Paula: Magnolia Park?

Wilson: Magnolia Park! Many years ago, back in the 20's, early 20's. And it was quite a... quite a real estate project there. They had their own real estate office there... I mean, real estate... they had a big real estate office there. But I mean, they had their own radio station. With his name... K. E. ... Earl L. White, KELW, I believe was the radio station in those days. And they also started this community church. And the Methodists furnished a pastor, which they do a lot. A Methodist used to be a... good at that, that was part of their missionary work, I believe. They would furnish a pastor. They started a community church somewhere, ...well we'll furnish the pastor and pay part of his salary from the missionary funds... and that's how they would get... And that's why, I think, a lot of these community churches were, were probably... uh, they called them community churches but later, why, they'd probably become Methodist, because... ha ha ha...

Paula: Yeah... ha ha ha...

Wilson: ... after they converted the...

Paula: ... congregation...

Wilson: ... congregation, why, it became a Methodist church. But I believe that's how they're started. But that was a very beautiful little church. Because, see, the real estate organization started this. Uh, Earl L. White contributed greatly to that. That was one of the show places and all.

Paula: It's very pretty, with all the Spanish decor.

Wilson: Yeah.

Paula: Archway and...

Wilson: Yeah, it's quite a...

Paula: ...it's kind of like a Spanish court yard.

Wilson: Yeah, it's started... I'm sure it started after the one in Burbank. Of course Burbank was a town way back before the turn of the century. Burbank and San Fernando and Lankershim was... uh, which is now North Hollywood. That was way back in the early days, the Weddington family and... another family, I think Jones [sp ?] were uh, were very active and big landowners there. Of course, Weddinton was uh, had the Bank of Lankershim and it sold to Security. And Security bought it. And then Weddington became a vice-president in uh, and a holder of a big, valuable real estate down there. And I guess the family still does.

Dodson: We've heard of the Weddington Brothers Store, I imagine that was before you have any recollections of valley, wasn't it? Or do you remember any such store?

Wilson: No, I don't remember the Weddington Brothers Store but I think that was before... probably before Fred [sp?] came along. See, Fred came along and Fred Weddington was probably, as I understand it, he was the son of the original Weddingtons, of one of the families. And he went into the banking business. He started this little bank. And he was a big man, he was like Whitsett only he was a bigger man. He was a great, big, husky man. I knew him, too, of course, being in the bank. A man that can tell you about these bankers, of course, is Chet Tayloe. I worked for Chet Tayloe, you know.

Dodson: Oh, is that so?

Wilson: I worked for him in the... the... back in 1935 and '36. In fact, I guess I was working for him when I ...when I quit, in 1936. He had the branch at uh...

Dodson: It was in Hollywood, wasn't it?

Wilson: Yeah, he he had the branch on the corner of Vermont and uh, Sunset. And Sunset then runs into the Hollywood Boulevard. You know, I think they called it the Vermont-Sunset Branch. And he was manager at that branch, in those days. And I worked there for a number of months, two different times.

Dodson: I believe he was never co-associate with one of the branch banks in the valley, was he?

Wilson: I don't believe so.

Dodson: It was entirely....?....

Wilson: I think.. le't see... he lived, he lived there in that neighborhood. That was a community there that developed... uh, that was a little suburb of Los Angeles in those days. Before Los Angeles took in everything, you know? That was a little suburb there. And he went to school there, as I understand, and when he got out of high school, he went to work for the bank. And uh, then later he moved out to where he lives now, Toluca Lake. In fact, I remember back in 1935 or '36, going to a party that he had for the employees there. And he had his uh, the start of his railroad and all.

Dodson: Is that right?

Wilson: And you think in those days! Yeah... of course his sons and all. And his two sons were very small at that time, just young fellows. Of course I was about 25 at that time, I think something like that.

Dodson: Have you seen the railroad since then?

Wilson: Oh yeah, yes. I was over there last year. He had an open house, you know, I was there that Sunday that he had an open house for our historical group. Yes, he's always been an interesting person.

Dodson: How did the Depression affect your family, here in the valley? Or did it?

Wilson: Well, yes. It affected the... the main... the main industry outside of farming in the valley and by the late 20's the valley as it grew, uh, it seemed that the building trade was the big occupation then. It was the main thing. And, of course, Lockheed Aircraft was going at that time. That was where I worked after I quit... for 36 years... before I retired, I was with Lockheed Aircraft. But, getting back to the Depression, the Depression hit the building trades. When we used to go to Los Angeles to a shop which we go to maybe once a week, why, we'd drive out of our way for several blocks or so to see a house that was being built. Because it was really an unusual thing in those days, to see something new being constructed. And, your people as I understand it, the main people out here, especially in the valley, that went on relief uh... that were desperate and had to go on relief were the people that were connected to the building trade. Because there just wasn't any work for them. And uh, you said, "How did it affect my family?" Well, my brother was uh, had gone to college one year, he was in U.S.C. one year. And he got out, got married, and so he quit at the end of the first year and this was 1928 I believe. And of course he had studied accounting, he got a job in accounting. But, he was always kind of hard to hold a job, and things were beginning to get tough. And when '29 came, why, jobs begin to get real hard. And so he was probably one of the firsts to go on relief. And I remember, of course he had a wife and a baby at that time, just a young fella. And I was still in school. And I remember that the first thing they did they had to come up to the fire station. And they'd give you a ration of food. Now that would be, maybe a five-pound sac of flour and uh...ten pound sac of flour maybe, and a couple pounds of sugar and... I don't know. A few staples that way and all. And, if you qualify and applied for it. And then they'd organize work teams and believe it or not, they'd send these fellows out and they'd go out on west Sherman Way, here. Of course in those days, west Sherman Way was a beautiful area with these big deodara trees, you know, and rose bushes, and all that on both sides of them. The street was divided and the street car track, the right of way track went down the middle, you know. And they send these fellows out with big brooms. They'd meet at the fire stations, they'd take them out in a fire truck. And in those days, they had a hose truck so they'd just take the hose out and them pile them in, in there. And they'd take them out with these big brooms and they'd spend all day long sweeping the streets. Well now, we... we thought that was peculiar, you know. Uh, s... sweeping streets in a farming area, where all the farms... err... land ones, there was no sidewalks around there, curbs. It was just kind of road, you know... along the edge there. But they don't... they'd go along to keep these fellows busy and all. And they'd sweep the streets, sweep one section one day and then go on out and all. But it was just to give them something to do until....

Dodson: That's what I understand.

Wilson: Well, my brother was a fellow who was very... with a very high IQ and uhm, it wasn't until a few days until he was made into a kind of a lead man over the group and had charge over this group. And after they got through sweeping here, why, and they couldn't find anything else to do... then someone got the idea to send them down to the Hollywood Bowl. So he went down to Hollywood Bowl and swept the Hollywood Bowl. Ha ha ha... They spent days sweeping... sweeping... they had to sweep it all around there and... and... uh, he used to come home and tell us the darndest stories that the fellows would tell him, you know? But uh, he went along after that until uh, he was uh, they found out he... he had accounting experience so they set up an office at San Fernando, the payroll office. Well by that time, these groups were beginning to spring up all over southern California. And they had quite an accounting office up there. And so he got a desk job, making out payrolls and so forth, and uh... and one day a gal went in there and everybody was afraid of her. The rumor was that she worked for the government in Washington, D.C.

and she was coming out here to kind of see....

[tape 1 side 2 ends]

Wilson: ... and he was working for... in this office in San Fernando, where they were making out the time, taking care of the time, and making out the paychecks and so forth... for the groups that were working out in the field. By that time, why, they were... they were doing projects, planting things, and beautifying buildings and various things by that time... and doing more constructive work than just sleeping. And when this woman came in... in from uh, Washington, why, she was there two or three weeks auditing and checking over to see... why, mainly why so much money was being spent in California. And why, uh... came to find out why one-sixth of the entire relief load for the forty-eight states, was being spent on California in that time.

Dodson: Is that right? That's one-sixth?

Wilson: One-sixth of it. And 52% of that was spent from the valley to the Mexican border. 52% of that one-sixth.

Dodson: Does that sound as if this section was harder hit than...?

Wilson: This section was harder hit. There wasn't the industry that we have now and all. And those figures are uh... as I recall... are very well accurate because as the story goes on, you'll find where I got them. Everyone was kind of clammed up and they were afraid of this woman. And she'd come out and ask everyone questions, well... nobody knew anything.

They weren't going to commit themselves, see? Ha... ha ha... And my brother opened up, and of course he was young and he didn't know any better. And so he'd tell her about everything that was going on and make suggestions how he thought things could be run more efficiently, you know? And when uhm, and so it turned out that when she got ready to leave, at the end of a couple of weeks, why, she called him into her office. And she said, she was trying to leave him there to continue the audit. And uhm, there was another week of auditing to be done and all. And she was telling him what she wanted him to do and all, and she put him on her salary... or on her...

Dodson: Payroll?

Wilson: Payroll. And when he was through he was to call her. And her office was in San Francisco. And from there, she sent him out to Orange County, they had another office similar to the San Fernando office in Orange County ....?.... He went out there and he worked there for three or four weeks. And when he was through there, why, he got a call from her. And he was to report to San Francisco the following Monday morning. So he went up there and he became her assistant. And he worked up there for uh, for a year, as her assistant. And when they got through... during that time, they published books of statistics on where this money was going and why so much of it was spent here and all these things. And they wrote a number of books for the government and uh, California seemed to be, at that time, kind of a pilot for this entire relief fund. Then from that... when this project, it collapsed or was finished, why, she went back to Washington. But she recommended him to one of the politicians or people in charge. And he became, went into the personnel department. And it wasn't long until he was head of the entire personnel... for what they'd call S.R.A. at that time. That was the State Relief Authority for California... and so he was in charge of the entire personnel. And he was making, I believe, two hundred or two hundred and fifty a month which doesn't seem that much money now, but in...

Dodson: But in those days, you were something!

Wilson: ... when you were making fifty-four dollars, I believe, for a man on relief... was getting... his relief... if you put in his alloted amount of work, during the month. He got fifty-four dollars a month, I think for a man and a wife and two children. And he could live on that!

Paula: Uh hmm.

Wilson: And he could buy the necessities and pay rent and so forth. I remember m'brother used to rent a house in Van Nuys for twenty dollars a month. And you'd get them for eighteen dollars, sixteen dollars, and so forth. And so he was on that job then until they changed the... uh, in 1936 I believe it was... they changed governors. And we had a Republican governor, as you recall, Roosevelt went in and it wasn't long until... a couple of years or so after Roosevelt went in. Why, uh, most of the states went democratic head on... head jobs and so forth.

Dodson: Yeah.

Wilson: So, we got a democratic governor in. Well, he was...

my brother was in... in that kind of a job you were in with the politics and all. And so he was pushed back immediately to assistant, and it wasn't long until he was let out.

Dodson: For a while at least, it sounds as though he was one of the few that profited during the Depression!

Paula: Ha ha ha...

Wilson: Yeah, he did... ha ha ha... he did real good at that time. Then he went... well, they pushed him around... he didn't get out entirely. He went over in the Co-ops then. And we had a number of State Coops. And he was supervisor of nine Coops. They had a Coop pickle fatory, and they had a little cannery... I don't remember what all they had. They had a surplus of food groups down here in Los Angeles, handling surplus food. And that was handled on a Cooperative sort of deal, and I know that was under him. He had that, and then it wasn't long until he got in with one of the... one of the suppliers... that uh, one was a brother of Norton Simon [sp?] actually! I forget what his name was, his ... name was Simon [sp?]... er... Sam Simon [sp?] or Abe Simon [sp?] or something! And he got in with him and worked at that for a while.

Dodson: Well, you've given us some very interesting information about the Depression. I hadn't realized that southern California was as badly hit!

Wilson: Oh, it was... southern California was really...really hit. And the reason was, there was very little manufacturing. The areas where there are a lot of manufacturing, of course, people buy a certain amount... or you can do something with it! You can keep a certain amount of people busy! And then they in turn keep the merchants busy and the merchants spend their money and all. But out here, there was nothing to keep that cycle going.

Dodson: Hhm. Well was the valley a little better off than some of the other sections of southern California, would you say? Or how would the valley rate with the rest of the area?

Wilson: I would say that the valley was one of the worse. Because now, in L.A., you have your stores. And you had people working in those stores. And those people in turn are bringing home paychecks and they were paying... they were able to pay their utilities and buy their groceries and all. But out here in the valley, you didn't have anything! You didn't have any stores, you didn't have... you probably didn't have hardly a hunred people working in Van Nuys. That's maybe uh, exaggerated a little bit. But, you didn't have many people working in those days. It's just everybody was in something connected to the building trades. And this area was just beginning to grow in 1929. And if you stopped all that, why, you stopped all that payroll.

Dodson: Do you recall whether any of our banks in the valley, buildings of loan associations went bankrupt? As a result from it? Or forced to close?

Wilson: Well, if you... if you knew anything about California in those days, we didn't have many independent banks. When I worked for Security Bank, it was Security Bank, California Bank, at that time Security Bank was about the biggest in California. California... er... California Bank and the Bank of America, now the Bank of America was big in San Francisco but it wasn't big throughout the state like it is now.

Dodson: It hadn't yet expanded.

Wilson: It hadn't expanded. The small bank in Van Nuys then was just a little hole in the wall. And it was for many years... all during the Depression was the Bank of America. Now it's the biggest building, the biggest bank building in Van Nuys I guess. Or the one that occupies or has the most employees and all. And now you've got all these independent banks. The only independent bank I know of, and it only had two branches, was the Bank of San Fernando. And it had one in Van... er, it had one in San Fernando, and it had one in Northridge, I believe, just a little branch in Northridge. But it was a very sound bank and I don't think it went under. I don't remember now what happened. I think one of the other banks finally took it over.

Dodson: Uh hmm.

Wilson: But, we didn't have a lot of banks go broke out here. We had down in Hollywood we had a few banks. Building and loans, there were a lot of building and loans during that time. I remember this ....?.... Building and Loan. And he had a bank and a building and loan. And he went under and closed because he was switching his assets from the bank to the building and loan. When he figures that the auditors were coming, why, he would shift his... uh

Dodson: Assets?

Wilson: Assets, over to the bank. And then when he figures the building and loan auditors were due, why, he shifts them over. And he was playing them back and forth. And one time, I guess they figured there was something... something clued them. And they hit both places at the same time! Ha ha ha... and he was embarrased. He went to jail over that.

Paula: Ha ha ha...

Wilson: That was quite a scandal out here . I remember that name ....?....

Dodson: One of the men we interviewed told us about Mr. Levy of the Bank of A Levy, who founded that. Do you know anything about that bank?

Wilson: No I don't. It's just a name to me. I know that it er... or I would assume that it started in....

Dodson: Ventura, I think.

Wilson: Ventura, yes. But any...

Dodson: But I think it does...

Wilson: ...branch out here, no. But that's where I saw it first. But I don't know when it started. But there weren't a lot of banks... like you go down Ventura Boulevard now, and you'll see banks with all kinds of names on it. Barclay... Independent... National... anything, you know. Farmers...er this Merchants and Manufactures Bank. They had a bank in Los Angeles, the... Farmers and Merchants Bank, and they didn't have any branches. Just one bank, and it was an old bank. It's been there for years, but very conservative and they believed in one bank. And they did everything out of that one... one office.

Dodson: What would you say has been the effect on earthquakes on the development of the valley? Has it had any effect, in your opinion? Slowed things down, or people were just indifferent to them?

Wilson: Well, I don't think that earthquake ever affected us in any extent, until the one on February 9th, 1971. I think that's the right date...

Paula: I think that is.

Wilson: Yeah.

Dodson: Yes. The year is right and the month is right, anyway.

Wilson: Well that was uh, that was the one that really shook us. I can remember the... when the Santa Barbara earthquake happened, I believe it was. I was washing my car and uh... just a young fellow then, of course, and many... this was back in the 20's... and I started to get out of the car and I couldn't get out. The car started shaking and uh, I couldn't figure out at first what was happening. I started to step out of the car and they threw me back in the car. But I remember as a boy, we went out there the following week and it was really something! You see six story building, you know, with a hotel buildings, and you just look at the wall... the bricks were just falling out. And here you could just see it. Just like shelves, you know, the beds, and the toilets, and the baths, and so forth, you know, and all. And it just rose up, you know. And... then the Long

Beach earthquake uh, the Long Beach earthquake happened during the bank holiday. And if you remember Roosevelt took office on fourth of March?

Dodson: Yes.

Wilson: I believe somewhere.

Dodson: Yes, that time was March 4th.

Wilson: Yes. And uh, as soon as, I think, the next day after he went into office, he closed all the banks in the country, something like that?

Dodson: Uh hmm, that's right.

Wilson: For a fifteen day holiday. And while they kind of got things in order... and although I was working for the Security Bank in Van Nuys at that time... And what they would do is... we really didn't have anything to do, so they'd give us a day off. The bank is on a monthly salary so they don't keep track of your time anyway. So the manager would give us each a day off, or an afternoon off, or something once a week and kind of spot it so that there'd be two or three gone at times. So a lot of the fellows that I worked with and I went to Long Beach that afternoon. And the reason we went down there was because the ....?...., Old Ironsides, was out here. They towed it around through the Panama Canal, and it was out here. And it was down at Long Beach, there, moored there to the pier. And so we went down and went through it. And I went through it last fall, back in... where its permanent resting place is, back in Boston. And, but anyway, we went to that and uh, we uh, then we went over to the Pipe here in Long Beach, walked along. We went into the... into a movie. And... about five o'clock in the afternoon... and saw this movie. And do you know that it was within forty-eight hours after that that building that we were in were shaken down. And it gave us some kind of sobering thoughts, you know.

Dodson: Yes!

Wilson: If we had taken Wednesday off instead of Monday, afternoon... we were down there on a Monday and I think this happened on a Wednesday afternoon about 4:50 or something in the afternoon the earthquake uh...

Dodson: It's worthy of note by the way, that among the 14,000 buildings that are now condemned in the Los Angeles area, there are, I understand, theaters and churches.

Wilson: Is that right?

Dodson: Yes. The ones that are considered unsafe in the event of a major earthquake in the future.

Wilson: Yeah.

Dodson: Was there much felt out here in the valley, as a result of the Long Beach earthquake?

Wilson: Well, no. I'm sorry you asked me that because I was... I was stopped in Santa Barbara, on the outskirts of Santa Barbara near the Miramar Hotel, I remember that very vividly. I was on the way to a Methodist Epworth League Convention at Santa

Barbara. And there were four of us... teenagers in a car. And we were stopped because I had a tail light out. And the officer stopped us, wanted to see drivers license and he gave us a shakedown because we were young kids in the car, you know, like they do. And so the minute he found out we were from the valley, he said, "Where were you during the earthquake?" Of course me, thinking he was talking about the Santa Barbara earthquake that happened eight years of so before, well I said, I gave him some screwy answer. And he said, "No, they had an earthquake about an hour ago and it shooked that whole area up!" And that was when the Long Beach earthquake... I guess my dates were wrong.

Dodson: We'd imagine that you would have felt that very strongly.

Wilson: That was on Friday, that was on Friday. I said we were down there on Monday and it was Wednesday we wasn't. It was Wednesday we were down there, it was Friday because Friday was when we were on our way to the... we were on our way to the convention up at uh, up at Santa Barbara. But when we got to the convention, why of course, everybody from southern California... they were from this area down here you know... oh, they were all worried. Because we didn't know, they didn't know at that time... of course we had radio and all... but they didn't know they didn't get reports in as fast than now, you know. Everything happens, why in a minute you'd know.

Paula: They weren't sure where it was centered or anything like that.

Wilson: No, no, at that time. Of course as the evening went on, why, everybody was calling home to find out what they knew down here and all. And there was quite a commotion that evening and the next morning, I know, to find out what had happened. And of course, the thing that happened at Long Beach not only was the earthquake but... uh... rumor got out or report, that there's going to be a tidal wave to follow that earthquake. And they didn't know what the tidal wave is going to do to Long Beach so, an awful lot of people left Long Beach and got up to higher ground. Because they didn't know how many miles that tidal wave would come and they were really worried, I know, I talked to people who slept in their car for two nights and all on high ground. Because they were afraid of this tidal wave that was supposed to follow the earthquake.

Dodson: Actually, there was no tidal wave.

Wilson: No, there wasn't. No, there was no tidal wave. But we have had tidal waves, you know, after earthquakes since then. The one in Achorage, and up in there, and one in Hawaii and so forth.

Dodson: Now you mentioned the Sylmar quake. Here in Van Nuys, did you feel that very strongly?

Wilson: Very strongly! I was in bed. I was working then of course, and I would get up about a quarter of uh... we'd get up about a quarter to five, our alarm would go off at about a quarter to five. And usually the alarm would come off and the radio would come on and we'd listen to the news a bit and get up, see? And a lot of times my wife would get up first. And this morning, she got up first and she had just stood up when it started shaking and it just shook her right... ha ha... she fell right back on the bed. Ha ha ha...

Dodson: Is that right?

Wilson: I've never felt an earthquake as strong or as long... now they said it only lasted... I don't know what... something like fourteen seconds or something, I don't know... but it seemed like an hour to me. But I never heard anything shake as badly in the house...?... like it did, and I've been through a number of earthquakes, but I've never felt one like that!

Dodson: That was my feeling too! I thought the whole house was going to collapse.

Wilson: It was really... it really shook!

Dodson: But....

Wilson: But the damage was very slight, though. We had no damage here. And at the time, I owned an apartment just over here. Eight... er... ten unit apartments over on the corner of Sherman Way and Tyrone. And the only damage there was light fixture, one of these globe types that someone had taken out to clean and hadn't got all the screws fastened in. And it shook and it broke, and that was the only thing that I had to replace out of ten units. Now, in uh... I went up to uh... Sylmar and that area, around San Fernando there, and I saw buildings that were actually shooked several degrees, turned several degrees off the foundation, you know, or on the foundation. It was just actually turned amid there and tear them down because of the shake and the twist.

Dodson: I think Paula and I have found out more about that Sylmar quake from talking to people than we ever got from reading the papers. I've been surprised at some of the information that we have turned up. I don't recall reading, for instance, that sections of San Fernando were without water for several days after that.

Wilson: Oh yeah. I went up there and they had pipes, they finally laid them on top of the ground and brought it in. Big pipe about so big around. And they had spigots and you'd go out with your bucket and every so often, about two door block, you'd go down and get it. Just like you're in a national park and you know, camping you'd go get your water in a bucket? Yeah, we went out there two or three times and saw that. That was really...that was really an earthquake as far as we're concerned. Of course we missed the one at Guatemala we got back... uh, I'm not saying that because I'm sorry... we got back to, we've been to Guatemala and uh, last February, January-February. And we just got back uh, San Diego the morning before the earthquake.

Dodson: Oh, is that right?

Paula: That was close! Ha ha ha...

Dodson: What would you say about the attitude of people toward earthquakes now, since the Sylmar earthquake? Do you think they're nervous over the predictions we're getting that there is a strong one coming?

Wilson: Well, my little grandson, who was just in here, is going to a nursery school. And we were down to pick him up uh, within the last ten days and talked to the owner of the school there. And she was, said she's been awfully busy, she was making up emergency schedules and so forth. So, they're all concerned about the... December 20th prediction. So apparently, people are concerned enough that people in some types of business apparently... I'm refering to her school of course, as a business. They are taking certain precautions now I don't know whether the other schools are or not. Whether the public schools are or not. But she said she was making up lists of how to get a hold of the different parents and so forth if they had to move the children from the area and so forth. If they had to evacuate them in a hurry or something.

Dodson: Well I don't believe that most seismologists are much worried about the predictions for December 20th. But they do feel that there is a major quake overdue.

Wilson: Yeah.

Dodson: The Palmdale bulge seemed to indicate the possibility of it. And I've seen today's paper that there is some movements close to the jet propulsion laboratory as well, in the Pasadena area.

Wilson: Oh, the Pasadena huh?

Dodson: Yes.

Wilson: So that was where my brother ended up after the war was here, jet propulsion lab. He was third man under Dr. Pickerring [sp ?] and Dr. Payne [sp?] over there...

Dodson: Is that right?

Wilson: ...for many years. I think he was there for twenty-five years or something like that, when he retired.

Dodson: You don't feel that these predictions are enough to make you sell your house and move, though?

Wilson: No, no. I think the taxes are, though. Ha ha ha...

Dodson: I think the future might be interested in knowing what our reactions are at the present time since we're getting all these quake predictions. I haven't been able to find anybody that I've interviewed, that has been much worried about it. The attitude seems to be that you can't do anything about it and you might as well wait and see what happens. Is that your attitude, too?

Wilson: Yes. Well the bible said that there would be earthquakes and rumors of earthquakes and all, and I don't know. I take the attitude that you can't do anything about it. I remember... I remember a family that I have heard of... and this was supposed to have been authentic. That was so shaken up by the earthquake here in February, you know, that they left and they went down into Texas somewhere. And I think they got down to Galveston or somewhere, just in time to get into a flood and they lost more in the flood than they did in the earthquake. And I don't think that it does you any good to run from a thing.

Dodson: Well I think that nearly every section of the country has some type of problem. Earthquakes seem to be ours, particularly, yes. So I don't know whether ours is worse than the others or not.

Wilson: Well, as in Texas a few... about six months ago, and they were having a storm down there. And everybody was beginning to worry about it if the clouds were beginning to get awfully dark, and it started raining, you know, and all. I was more worried about that than I was about earthquakes.

Paula: Talking about rain, do you remember the floods that they had here I believe, in the late 30's?

Wilson: Oh yeah, do I remember that! In 19... March 1938 that was. And I was working at Lockheed and I can remember it rained and I guess it had rained oh... for a number of hours and it just hadn't let up. Of course we didn't stay home from work because of a little thing like rain. But the river came out and they were going to close the plant and send everybody home. The water was getting pretty heavy in the valley. And so... our normal quitting time was 3:30 and they blew the whistles and close the plant down something around 1:30. And I started home, from Lockheed, coming across. That time I lived at Oxnard, we had to live there for many, no, it was since 1920. Started across, and we got, I got to Lankershim Boulevard, and I knew the valley enough and all these normal washes that went through. And when there's a lot of rain, we just couldn't get through there was dangerous to drive a car through it. Instead of having bridges over them, you'd just went down into the wash, and it was cement, you know and all. But the flow of the water would take the car. And lots of time when it was bad that way. So, the first wash, the other bridge was by Chandler there by the park just by Tujunga. And I came over there and I started thinking I'd go across there, and the water was oh... running over that, maybe about a foot high. And they had the city trucks there and they wouldn't let you cross there. Of course, a lot of people would gone on across it if they let them. They'd figure, oh, well, we could go through there, it isn't that deep yet, and they'd go on across, see? They wouldn't let you across. So, then, as you went on over there was... let's see... there was another wash then on over about a mile that you had to cross. And if you got up... if you stayed on Chandler there, why, there's another bridge up there that you could have gone across if they'd let you. But they wouldn't let us cross that. So I went up, I knew the valley enough that I went up Lankershim Boulevard to San Fernando, and San Fernando had two big cement bridges and they're quite high, so you could go across and over these washes there. And I came down Whitman. And I went through a little water but got down Whitman into Oxnard. And I know... that there were times during the wet winter... we used to have to come from Oxnard up Hazeltine to Sherman Way and across Sherman Way to Lennox, here, which is the first street east of Van Nuys Boulevard... and go down Lennox and then cross that Tyrone wash that go down and empty into Tyrone. There's a wash here that uh... since the flood control, there's been little water, but there's a wooden bridge there that you could usually get across that. But the water never got so high that you couldn't get over that little wooden bridge. And we'd go over and down Van Nuys Boulevard. But, since they put that flood control in, which I understand is ten feet in diameter through Van Nuys, and as it gets further it gets to about twelve feet in diameter. They put that in after the war. We had so much water and the water got so... I guess there were places that .....

[Tape 2 side 1 ends]

[tape 2 side 2]

Wilson: ....Boulevard so badly that it got into the gas company basement, they had quite a basement there with all their records. And I guess they put enough heat on the city that they started doing something about it. And there were several other stores at that time that had the... the basements, and they'd all have water sales then afterwards. Sell the damaged goods and so forth. And of course the gas company, I don't know what they did with their records. But, it wasn't long after the war until they... because after the war of course, these buildings started going in that had basements. And then, when we had a wet winter we had problems. And that was the thing that encouraged the city, I guess, to put this big tube down the center of Van Nuys Boulevard.

Dodson: Was there any difference between the Van Nuys and North Hollywood business district and which one was worse hit during a flood? Or were they both hit?

Wilson: I don't think that North Hollywood... I don't think that North Hollywood was hit. North Hollywood was a little higher, that terrain there is uh... let's say this that uh, as the flood control, which was just dry washes during the summer time and the raging torrents during the wet weather... these things would get bigger if it got further down the valley. And they would make a bigger gorge and they would keep themselves within that gorge, and they wouldn't spread out so.

Dodson: I see.

Wilson: And Van Nuys didn't have any natural water ways.

Up here, everybody, well if it went to my property, why I'd just divert it over to the next guy. And everybody was just shooting it back and forth and uh, the people on Tyrone used to get mad. And they'd ...?... See, that water comes from the west side of comes down through a cut there, on the... over by... over almost to Kester, say. So they'd go up there and they'd... at first that water... see, the water would come down and cross Van Nuys Boulevard over Valerio, here. And that's the place where it goes into this channel, it goes down Van Nuys Boulevard in this big tube, the storm drain. And now, before that, you can see where the water comes from... there at Valerio on Van Nuys Boulevard, there's bridges there and all where they have the storm drain. Well that water would come down and go across and go down Tyrone. Well, the people they called up the East Side Protective Society and the West Side Protective Society. Well the East Side Protective Society was mad because they couldn't get across to the town, they couldn't cross Tyrone and it gets so heavy that there are times you couldn't drive across it. So they would go up, above Valerio here, and they would open that water out and divert it and let it go down Cedros and Vesper. And one day we went up town and it's been raining and the water's been real bad up on Tyrone, there wasn't a drop of water on Tyrone. But you go down Cedros and it was all going down Cedros. Well, the East Side Protective League had been up and they cut a hole in the dike and let it go straight down. And they were fighting back and forth on... on that... on who would get the water and sort. As I say, as it went straight down then it finally got down into the Los Angeles River, and it went down the river. But back in the 30's, they had... early 30's... they had some real bad rain and they... and the area was washed out.

They had more water than the Los Angeles River could take care of. Came down from the hills, they had fires that burned off underbrush and so forth, the watershed. And then they had a wet winter and instead of water rolling down, there were boulders rolling down with the water, you know, and it was taking out everything in its way.

Dodson: Would you say then that in Van Nuys, water has really been bigger problems than earthquakes?

Wilson: Oh yes.

Dodson: As far as the valley was concerned?

Wilson: Yes, I would say so. Well that one in the 30's in March of 1938, the area that is... Sears and Roebuck building is on, there in the valley plaza now, was ... that area has always been sandy. And they would raise sweet potatoes in there, which is ideal soil for sweet potatoes. And there were oh... quite a large acreage along there. Now that would be on... that would be near the corner of Laurel Canyon and Victory and all that area in there was big potatoe, er... sweet potato ranches, or farms. And when that water came through there, it cut through there and overflow the banks. And it brought in silt so badly that I don't think they ever raised anything in there until Sears came along and bought the property.

Dodson: Yes, just the story would prevent it.

Wilson: Yeah, and where the May Company is is another area. And that area, and that is one reason, I think, why those big stores are located in there. Because they can buy the land real cheap. There was a fellow by the name of Bob Simons [sp ?] who's a big real estate. Simons [sp ?] was a big real estate developer and he bought all that land. He bought it from the farmers for a little of nothing and he developed it. And I don't know how many acres, several hundreds of acres in there. Now that water came in there and overflowed its banks there in that vicinity, it comes down across Victory Boulevard just west of Laurel Canyon, and then it goes down and crosses Laurel Canyon before it gets to Oxnard. That was just a natural wash and just a dip in Victory before you got to Laurel Canyon, and as you went down Laurel Canyon why it had a dip, and the wash cross through there so it overflowed. Well, it came down there so fast and so hard that it just took off down Laurel Canyon. And they cleaned, when they cleaned out days later, when they were cleaning out the debris and silt and all they found a body... several bodies in that silt there, yeah. I knew a farmer there that had a place there, and he said that it just made him sick. He said that he started digging his way out to get his pickup from his ranch house out to Laurel Canyon, and he said he uncovered a woman's body. Well, he started to and then he called the fire department and they came down and dug it out. He said that it just made him sick. He said, he uncovered an arm, I think he said or a hand or something and he just stopped digging.

Dodson: My section in La Crescenta had a bad flooding in the 30's, I don't suppose you remembered that?

Wilson: That was the early 30's.

Dodson: Yes.

Wilson: That was the one that brought all these rocks and all, down. Rocks went right through... boulders... oh, boulders! I bet five to six feet in diameter came down through and went through houses.

Dodson: I can imagine.

Wilson: Right there on the hill sides. Yeah, I went up there and saw that area. And it came down through Glendale there, and followed the wash of course, but it always brings a whole lot of silt and dead wood and all. Down through that, dead branches and all, and that was just a mess through there!

Dodson: Well I've heard stories that there is still streets twenty feet underground up there!

Wilson: Oh, is that right?

Dodson: I don't know if there's any truth in the stories, but I've heard them.

Wilson: Well, I don't know if they're still there but there certainly were, I'll bet, at that time.

Dodson: Of course when I first went up there and wanted to locate up there, the real estate men would all tell me that the flood was on the other side of the street. Not on this site, where you're looking at the lot. So the flood was highly specialized on which side of the street it was on.

Wilson: I don't know what year you moved there...

Dodson: 1948, 1948.

Wilson: 1948. By that time, though, they had put in flood controls... little basins, up in there.

Dodson: Yes, I think they...

Wilson: Maybe not the thick flood controls but they had put in small ones that would retain the water and slow the water down, was the thing. But, the main reason that that happened, see, you've got two things working together. First you had the big fire that summer burned out all the undergrowth and a lot of the trees ... killed a lot of trees up in there, all through that area. And then you have... which was an unnatural situation that you wouldn't have every year... then you had an abnormal amount of wet weather and rainfall. And it rained there for several days and all of a sudden, all that stuff had just let go and...

Dodson: That's what I understand.

Wilson: If it hadn't been... if it hadn't been for the two things working together, if it hadn't been for the fire, it could've stood all the rain and it probably wouldn't have created much damage. Or, you could've have the fire and normal rainfall last year and probably not have the damage.

Dodson: It's just the conjunction of the two events...

Wilson: At the same time, yeah. And that happened uh... out here, at times that we'll have a real wet winter and nothing will happen. But, if you get two things together, why, it just can't stand it! That's really really an awful thing.

Dodson: What do you regard as the most important thing that has happened in the valley, since you've lived here?

Wilson: Well, of course the water has been a big thing with us. And one of the big things was that storm drain that they put down Van Nuys Boulevard.

Dodson: Which ended the flood problem?

Wilson: Which ended the flood problem, yes. And of course they're right now putting one down Hazeltine. They are just up... just south of Van Owen, now, on it... they're coming up and they're going to go on up to one of these natural water ways here, because that still gets a certain amount of water. Then the freeways and the high rise buildings are the big thing that've... in my mind, that have happened in the valley.

Dodson: Hh hhmm.

Wilson: Of course all these apartments and all this jungle of blacktops that we have all over.

Dodson: We've mentioned the crime situation, which you feel is somewhat worse than it used to be. How do you think the question of morals generally apply to the valley, do you think there's a decline? For instance, when you were in school I imagine you never heard of the use of narcotics, did you?

Wilson: No, no. Of course Van Nuys is supposed to be one of the... has been in recent years, it's been one of the really bad places, I guess, for...for... narcotics. We know people who have trouble with their children because of the narcotics. Ours fortunately got through school before that, before it got so bad, I guess. But our neighbors have had some problems. But I think, of course everybody's got their theory, my theory is the working mother has... doesn't have much time in the home, to raise the children, and to keep an eye on the children. And the more you work, the tireder you get. The more hours you put in the less time you have to do things together. And if you can't do things together, why, you have... you have problems I think.

Dodson: Do you feel that school discipline was less when your children were in school than when you were in school? Or did you feel there was any difference, here in the valley?

Wilson: Well, I think that we didn't have the need for school discipline as much when I was in school, as you do now. And I... I... I don't think the schools are allowed to discipline them as much as they were then. And I think the kids know it, and as a result they can... they can get away with a lot more. I don't think they have the discipline at home and they know that schools aren't allowed to discipline them. And this discipline thing is a big deal with kids that...parents sent their kids to school and they complain this school doesn't discipline, and this school says well heck! there's no time to teach the kids discipline, they're supposed to learn discipline before they get of a school age. And if they haven't, then you send them to school and expect us to take them when they're passed the learning age of that type of learning you expect us to teach them. So... I don't know, I think it's kind of a bad situation. I certainly symphatize with the... with the schools. Because we have more... I'm not a school teacher, naturally, my wife taught school many years ago, but we have more school teachers and people connected with the educational system, I guess, than any other one thing in our family... so maybe I symphatize a little more with them. John Snell I don't know whether you know him or not...

Dodson: Yes, yes I do.

Wilson: ...he's my wife's cousin. His wife, that is her cousin, she was a school teacher for many years until she got interested in ...?... and went into selling ...?... they found out she could make money easier selling ...?... than teaching school.

Dodson: Well maybe the schools are a little more interfered with now by the court, say, than they used to be.

Wilson: Well I think so. I think the whole thing is. I guess I'm kinda radical on this thing. I think our whole problem is we've got these smart lawyers real smart lawyers that uh... that find that they can stir people up and make a better living easier than they can working at their trade the way they should be doing it. And I think that's why we have so much trouble with them. Minority groups and... whereever there's friction, boy, they get in there and say they can't do that to you.

Dodson: Well I think we've found that we have to be careful in any disciplinary actions or we will have a court order against us and that sort of thing.

Wilson: ....?.... The police are the same way. Anybody who was going to discipline anyone, no matter how badly they need it, they're going to have trouble at the court and you're going to have... you're going to have a lot of lawyers and judges and everybody else start going down a big salary from it. At least that's my opinion. Ha ha ha...

Dodson: What do you think about changes in fashion as you've seen them here in the valley? Have you been conscious of drastic changes? Now we've been talking about the schools, what a student would wear to school for instance, between your day and now?

Wilson: Of course this fashion deal is is really something. I remember going to uh, over to junior high when my uh, daughter was in junior high. And I remember the boys' vice principal saying this, that if a boy came to school with hair so long why down under his collar why, he was sent home. And some of the parents said, why, he can wear his hair any way he wants to. He said, well, experience has taught us that the kid that has the long hair is always the center of trouble. And he said we can always find that , of course this was before remember, before everybody got to wearing long hair and it got as popular as when it first started. He said that was the kid that was always right in the thick of everything. He said whenever there's any trouble, or he said if he dressed differently than the other kids, some outlandish uh... colors or mould of dress, he says, we'd send him home. And he says, they're having more problems now, he says getting the parents to realize why we're sending him home. Not because we're picking on Johnny and all and uh, we want him to conform but he says, we find that he not only gets into trouble but he pulls four of five other kids with him and he says, we're all having trouble.

Dodson: How do you feel about the girls' costume? Do you think there's a drastic change there? For better or for worse?

Wilson: Well, no... well... of course...

Dodson: Paula'll forgive you, you can speak freely. Ha ha ha...

Wilson: Some are... some are... some are exhibitionist, of course. And I don't think that's good, that isn't a good at all. I think it... it creates problems. Of course I'm with the old school, naturally, at my age... But I remember I was active in the Y.M.C.A. twenty some years ago, I remember when Jane Russell was in this picture, you know, The Outlaw?

Dodson: Uh hmm.

Wilson: And all the billboards were exposing more of her bust than is normal at that time, of course now we're used to that. They say that, a juvenile officer spoke before a group that I was in. He said that they could, the minute those billboards came out, you could just watch the crime, he says, among the young... young kids. I want to say young kids, I'm talking about the high school kids and so forth and all. And he said they could tie it right down to those billboards.

Dodson: Is that right? They believed there was a connection?

Wilson: Yeah, very much, he said. He said uh... least, that was his talk. Maybe it made a good after dinner speech.

Dodson: I know there's always been some controversy as to whether movies or anything like that, do influence people enough to have any effects. Of course at the present time we wonder about whether all the violence shown on television or the movies, have a bad effect on people.

Wilson: Yeah, of course there's two schools of thought on that, as you well know. But I don't know... violence they say... of course the little kids are so used to that... to them it's just a story. But sometimes you wonder. I don't know... But he said, he gave quite a talk on that, the Jane Russell deal. And the funny thing was that I know of Jane Russell. Of course she went to Van Nuys High and so forth, graduated from Van Nuys High. And her mother has a place over here, in fact they have a church. They're quite religious, the family.

Dodson: Yes, I am aware of it.

Wilson: And it seems kind of strange, to be as religious as they are, and yet to portray these things. But according to what her mother said, she thinks it's good for her daughter to do these things. Because she's so different from that, that this isn't her at all. That she is merely just acting and showing uh, an effect there. But... I don't know... ha ha ha... I have some other thoughts about it.

Dodson: Well of course at the time that Howard Hughes made that picture, it was something of a sensation and I think many theaters didn't show it.

Wilson: That was ... well I didn't see it so I can't say too much about it. All I saw were the billboards and heard this speech the fellow gave. At that time I was too busy with other things, I wasn't going to movies much. But yeah, this would probably what we considered... we would've considered it an x-rated movie, maybe, in those days.

Dodson: Yes. Now that's interesting in itself, noone else has mentioned that picture. At the time, that picture created something of a sensation. And now I don't believe it would have any effects at all.

Wilson: Oh no, no. Oh, I wouldn't think so at all. Because from what I understand, there was nothing but just some suggestive scenes in it. I mean uh, your x-rated movies as I understand, which I'm not an authority either, but... x-rated movies go into actual ...actual scenes. They not only suggest but they show. Not only from sex, but from a gruesome standpoint, too. I guess I've seen maybe R-rated and so that they are terrifically bloody and things like that, which I don't think does anyone any good.

Dodson: Now that would be a definite change. Not only here in the valley, but in the country generally of what is acceptable, wouldn't you say?

Wilson: Yeah. Well I was talking to some friends and their son is a nuclear physicist teacher up at Berkeley. And they go up to see him periodically. And here, not too long ago... the last four or five years or four years. They were telling me this story. They went up to see him and so he took them to see an X-rated play... or took them to some play and yeah it did have a ...?... in it that was nude. So I don't know, it was supposed to be a little shocking and all. But it had a value. And she said, there weren't many there, there wasn't a crowd and all. It was in San Francisco where they went. But, coming back, they went by a couple theaters where they had a... where there was a terrific crowd out, they just stand in lanes to get in to the next showings, see? And she said, what are these pictures? And he said oh these pictures are morally gay and homosexual times. He said, everybody's going to that nowadays. And she said, gee... She happens to be a retired school teacher, and she said, what's this world coming to? Ha ha ha... You know? She said, apparently the sex... normal type of thing is not... has... it's kind of passé now. They've... you know, they've got their fill of that and now they want to see something different. And...

Dodson: The type shown in The Outlaw wouldn't go anymore.

Wilson: No. So... you don't know what the next step will be. We hope the pendulum could only swing so far and it will start swinging back, ha ha ha...

Dodson: Well that's rather interesting to put that reaction on tape because I don't think anybody else has quite mentioned it to quite the same degree. Ha ha ha... Do you know of other historic events or anecdotes that you have about the valley that we haven't ask about at all?

Wilson: ....?.... thought of a lot of things... Well, getting, maybe this is out of text, getting back to uh... our teenage activities, I didn't mention that the Cornwell [sp ?] swimming pool was the big thing, probably the only swimming pool in this part of the valley.

Dodson: Where was it located?

Wilson: It was located on the east side of Kester oh... probably a thousand feet north of Van Owen. Now that was about two and a half miles from my... from where I lived. And we'd walk on a hot summer day, we'd walk two and a half miles to go swimming a couple of hours. And then we'd be so tired out from walking and from swimming that we'd have to buy a hot dog and something to drink, you know, before we started home. And of course they had a hot dog stand there and all. And this Cornwell [sp ?], around the school busses, I think there was two brothers. One ran the swimming pool and one ran the school bus. And they had two boys in high school, and they were a little older than I was. As soon as they got out of high school, and got so they can drive... why, they were driving the buses. And they... they... the buses was run on a private contract... they contracted someone to uhm, run the buses. So they had these school busses and they had... I don't know... four or five of them. And instead of being painted yellow like all school-busses right now, why they were painted school colors which were crimson and grey. And they would go out in the morning and pick up the kids and bring them to school. They had enough elementary schools around that they... I don't think that... well, they picked up some I guess, but not as much... mainly high school students. You see, I didn't have a high school in North Hollywood, which we called Lankershim. In fact, the first high school was Lankershim High. And they called it Lankershim High for some time after the town was changed to North Hollywood. But I remember that if you lived in Lankershim, you either went to Hollywood High or you went to Van Nuys High. And you could go... they'd let you go either way, that you were on the dividing line there. And I know some of them that would come to Van Nuys, and then the next thing I hear they were going to Hollywood. But they'd get on the red cars, Pacific Electric cars, and ride back and forth to school. That's how they would get to school.

Dodson: There were no high schools in the west part of the valley at that time?

Wilson: Well there was Owensmouth High School, which is Canoga Park now. Yeah, there was a high school there. There was Canoga Park, San Fernando, Van Nuys, and Burbank. And that's all the... all the high schools there were. And Burbank got to growing so rapidly. Before I got out of high school, why they weren't even in our Valley league. They were in Glendale league of the bigger schools, because it was too big. And they had too many to pick from, and they had too many big brewsters to play with the normal valley kids.

Paula: ....?.... they're still in there.

Wilson: Are they?

Paula: Yeah, they're playing Glendale, Pasadena, places like that.

Wilson: Yeah.

Paula: Yeah, Foothill League.

Wilson: Well they weren't happy when they went in there because they got... they were the little team and they were getting uhm... trounced by the big schools.

Dodson: Uh hmm.

Wilson: And I think they came back into the system for uh, for a year or two, and then they took them back out again. They were real unhappy. They were kind of northern, they were kind of in between. They weren't big enough to be in the big schools, and they were too big to be in the little schools. And we used to have to go over way to West L.A. to play because, in order to find a school that was comparable in size. We had some schools over there that we used to go over and play with. ....?.... now we got too many schools, I guess, in the valley that...

Dodson: Oh yes. Like high schools... I don't have any idea just how many there are.

Wilson: I don't either, but I see a lot of them as I drive around the valley.

Dodson: Well do you think of something else that we haven't asked about? That you'd feel should be recorded?

Wilson: Well, let's see if I put down anything here.... No, I really.....

Tape 2 side 2 ends.